

Hiram R. Revels (1827-1901)



Hiram R. Revels, first black U.S. Senator

Hiram R. Revels was born on September 27, 1827, in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Revels was a minister who, in 1870, became the first black United States senator, representing the state of Mississippi. He served for a year before leaving to become the president of a historically black college. Despite being born in the south in a time of widespread slavery, Revels was a member of a free family. He and his brother both apprenticed as barbers. Revels' brother subsequently owned his own barbershop.

In 1845, Revels was ordained as a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and preached in Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Tennessee, Missouri and Kansas. He was imprisoned in Missouri in 1854 for preaching the gospel to blacks. During this time, when it was illegal to teach blacks, Hiram learned to read and write from a free black woman. He later completed his education at Beech Grove Quaker Seminary in Liberty, Indiana.

When the Civil War started in 1861, Hiram recruited two black regiments from Maryland (blacks were permitted to fight during that time). The Civil War ended in 1865 with the death of more than 620,000 Union and Confederate soldiers.

In 1870, the state congress selected Revels to fill a vacant seat in the United States Senate. Debate surrounding his eligibility hinged on the 1857 Dred Scott decision, which precluded black American citizenship. The decision was effectively reversed by the ratification of the 14th Amendment after the Civil War. Democrats argued that Revels did not meet the nine-year citizenship requirement to hold congressional office given his ineligibility for citizenship through the war years. Ultimately, Revels and

his Republican allies prevailed by citing Revels' mixed-race background, and Revels became the first black American to serve in the United States Senate.

Revels died on January 16, 1901, in Aberdeen, Mississippi. He was married to Phoebe A. Bass, and they had six daughters.

For more information on Hiram Revels, please visit:

[http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/REVELS,-Hiram-Rhodes-\(R000166\)/](http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/REVELS,-Hiram-Rhodes-(R000166)/)

Public Affairs Office - Mid-Pacific Region

916-978-5100

mppublicaffairs@usbr.gov